

Half-Shine

by

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Almeida, Alexis (MFA, Creative Writing,
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Introduction to *Half-Shine*

In a recent Poetics Statement he wrote for the Lyric Postmodernisms anthology, Peter Gizzi says: “As I listen to a poem unfold in my ear it becomes clear that for every line I hear there are more lines resonating in the same field of meaning. Listening is everything in poetry: to silences, the pauses, shifts in syntax, tone and content.” *Half-Shine* is primarily a manuscript about listening – listening for subtle shifts in consciousness, openings in habituated speech and registers of thought, and finding them occurring in social, private, and even allegorical realms. I wanted these poems to speak to the possible co-existence of these registers and spaces, but most importantly, I wanted them attuned outward – to always be listening for the vital material that is able to come in from without.

I start with Gizzi because I think he has been the most influential writer to me during my time in the program. I say this knowing it is a large statement that probably contains kernels rather than blankets of truth. But I *want* to believe it, because reading his work opened me up toward different possibilities in language. His lyric creates a certain type of simultaneity that has become very me – it seems to be spoken both from “inside” the lyric I, and also from “outside” it, from a more remote, perhaps disembodied place. In this, his poems always seem to be questioning the positioning of this “I” in relation to larger networks – history, political structures, relationships – and to be shaping this questioning into lyric possibility. In the same statement, he writes: “What amazes me is how specific the “other” or phantom poem can be, and it occurs to me how language, when arranged, manipulated, built, or what you will, is saying both readings – together and separate. I imagine that the lyric is next to my life, but isn’t my life at the same time that it is real.” Here, Gizzi interrogates the lyric space and the plausibility of its inclusion in the social space, and these are concerns that very much resonate in my work.

Half-Shine started with a clear aim: to measure the distance between belief and doubt. It also started with a central premise — that of the miracle — which came and went as I worked on the manuscript. The idea of the miracle became important to me through my family: I have many cousins and more distant relatives that truly believe in them, and have tried to convince me to also believe in them. For my poems, this translated into an exploration of the lyric space and its interaction with what is outside of it, the possibility that, as Peter Gizzi says, it “isn’t my life but at the same time [is] real.” This also includes the lyric subject.

To expand on this a bit: rather than conceptualize the miracle as proof of God’s existence, as it would be in the Bible, I tried to think of the miracle as a correspondence, an unforeseen dialogue with something or someone that exists within a social or linguistic sphere. In the manuscript, the speech act becomes important in this regard — often a speaker is addressing an unseen subject that she senses is there. The desire being expressed is to bring them closer. Incantation is a mode I use a lot when expressing this desire. What is important to me is that the speech act is not sovereign (again, the way the miracle is traditionally enacted) but is contingent on an interaction with something else. What I hope to evoke is not a sense of transcendence, but a sense of immediacy, which, as Kierkegaard says is a mode in which “everything is true.” I want this mode of belief to be less dependent on an idea of actual “truth” than a sense of lyric possibility, which could also translate to agency brought about by imaginative thought.

Doubt surfaces in more reflective poems, in which the lyric “I” is able think about itself from more of a distance, is perhaps “speaking” to itself from a distance. These poems express a different sort of desire — the “you” is notably absent or more dispersed in many of them. They also question language’s ability to cohere or redeem this fragmentation, which I mean to valorize — this is an important question to have. I also don’t mean to create an opposition between belief and doubt here — I only hoped to show them as elements of the process of poetic creation.

Another important element of this manuscript is its response to the idea of knowing. Different methods of quantifying knowledge are mentioned in poem titles — studies, photographs, indexes — but these titles are meant to cut against this idea, creating affective webs rather than definitive methods for knowing or understanding. Even in my prose sections, “Five Last-Minute Pilgrimages,” and “Photographs

of Women in Various States of Illumination,” I hope to delimit the framework I’ve placed on the work somehow. This is a response to my process. I found as I was writing that the logic of the pieces started to create itself in the act. Perhaps this is where my interest in “illumination” comes from – St. Augustine’s belief in supernatural, or divine intervention in the realm of thought, or Simone Weil’s worship of emptiness, which is the place to “receive grace.” I don’t believe in the divine part, but I do think a vital catalytic process occurs while opening, or being outside the self, which the lyric “I” – in its ability to migrate inside/outside itself in a poem – can facilitate, inspire, or speak to at the very least. One of the main ideas of this manuscript is that the self exists in a linguistic network larger than itself (and not the other way around), but I don’t think the self has to be destroyed in this discovery – only re-inscribed (sometimes sorrowfully, sometimes ecstatically) in different contexts.

Finally, *Half-Shine* works through issues of trauma, bewilderment, loss, fear, and love. It takes on issues of gender and “othering” and will continue to develop these threads as the book continues to shape. It is primarily about listening to my imagination conjure the voices and the material it has collected for the past three years. Thank you for reading it.

for Oren

Thank you Julie, Noah, and Patrick for all of your support.

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And the miracle consists simply in the fact that it exists

Simone Weil

No Wars Forget Me

after Alice Notley

After leaves, inward

After the splashing, alive

After aching, tin metal

After I'm dark, I'm strong

After rain, a kneeling figure

After winter, no memory

After you, her

Selves to the waves

Light as a strip

After fucking, frames in each

physique of voice

After the Camry, whoever is watching

A light charm probably

Came in from the snow

After the river, bolts of silk

Spaciously running

The stars have gone

far on their course

Nothing Works (Everyone's Praying)

Your ears were red. The air was dry. The roof was leaking. We put out a bowl. Like the sun. You were walking fast. The sidewalk jolts. The wires were down. My apartment glowed. It was underground. The air vent broke. An old woman showed up. She made us soup. She was the color of wine. My tire was stolen. The pedals snapped. Let's go, you said. Take a walk downtown. The trees were swaying. The signals were bad. Your hand was a soreness. I ordered grilled cheese. The air was sick. The windows shook. I can't do it on time. I imagined spinning. I imagined water, and nothing. I imagined aspens. Their steady pull. The floors were cold. I put my palms on the table. The curtains spread open. A man blocked the light with his hands.

The Aspen Trees Were Panicking

We saw this one drifting in a halo in space.
A pinecone spinning just as you came out to greet us.
To not be afraid of other people,
I need to reach toward the distant, glowing material.
It's hard to speak of autumn reasonably,
I don't know how I got here so fast.
This leaf once held a more
perfect leaf.
If there is joy in not knowing,
is there pleasure in approaching the sink.
I cannot sense your whereabouts with my
whereabouts, so I tessellate the walls
of every apartment I've ever lived in and every other
apartment I can find.
Then I live there, like love is living there
just pasted to the sidelines.
I'd like to build a road there, but sometimes
geography falls away.
October is shining from its silver
ledge, an orange footprint spinning in a room.
Discovery is like saying
you never knew what a longboat looked like
and having a clear memory of before.
You're standing on nothing and then the insides cluster
and there is room for new water to rise.
Take me somewhere and let's start again.
I see a squirrel approaching for food.
I see silver leaves filling with light.
I say look at the satellites
and the satellites move.

Study of my Body in Mourning

after Joy Katz

Some men prefer women
with longer hair, larger
breasts.

*

Some women invent games with squirrels,
fit their hands inside gloves.

*

The child in front of me coughs
toward his Mother
(how do I protect my face?)

*

In the dream where everyone is dancing
I remove my feet

*

I am not a doctor, not a lithographer,
not a bottle with something
glowing inside

*

I am beautiful in the morning
In the wake of an argument

*

For months I wake up
in a quiet state of panic
I think of her grief, not mine.

*

Walking toward campus
I believe myself invincible.
Then the cold overtakes me,
like a color.

*

Heat is a simple, non-negotiable want:
This flower, *this* disease.

*

I turn toward the mirror.
You hold me up by the hips.

*

There is a holy arching to my skin.

*

I want to give you something
as it flies from my face.

*

I prepare for sensation with decency
and wine

*

I open my mouth to scream
The walls do not flap

*

I have made a monument
resonant only to me.

*

A fire is a piece of fire.
A dish another dish.

*

This person is all about me.
Everything is the flavor of tin.

*

I might expire inside this hum.

*

In the shower
the evasive airwaves

*

Hold me up beneath the spray

Sung to an Empty Room

That I came here to be silent. That I can lean
On my elbows in the dark. That through you
I can hear a cello string moving, am not less of myself. That in a dream
I fell to my knees. That the stars were mistaken for Gods, then eyelids, then
Smoldering rocks. That they pull a ship. That
I can walk by without anyone noticing, that
I make sense to most people. That to mend it, we move
Away from the source. That against that there
Is a war and to be with others during a time
Of war. That two old women walked by me arm in
Arm wearing black dresses and long black scarves. That we call a body dead,
That we bury it in dirt. That sound erupted into bottles
And yellow bolts of air.
That my heater keeps me warm,
That my body loves me
In the morning, and when walking up hills.
That we ran so quickly
Down the stairs into the cold so angry with fear
So angry with fear.
That somewhere a wave is resting, that that man had
A pistol in his belt. That the poet said fragments of moon
Would be drawn into the dead man's mouth. That before you,
Someone tried walking to mimic
The shape of thought. That we can shake out blankets,
It is snowing, that we can shake blankets
In the non-existent snow.
That we can sit here watching it until morning.
It is a small thing to do.

Elegy

after Shamala Gallagher

I don't want to think of courage
and what it cannot save.
I only want to know why
the air falls apart
when I pull.
And why the scent of metal always shows up.
It's not living in your mouth
And then it is.
No matter what
is moving underneath you
it will get there.
The thought of breaking
It will get there.
Imagine saying that
to no one present.
Something speaks through you
the way another person might.
I saw you driving on the highway.
The smell of you
spreading on the highway
And here on my
very own arm.

Epithalamium (Dream)

In the doctor's office
I ate three mints
And then he told me
You are not the kind of person
Who has a body
Fit for babies
And triathlons
Here is some information
A trampled hand
On my way home
It was like everyone was
Asking me if I needed
Candy
Or directions
No, not really
Fuckers,
Don't notice me
For my suffering
I am not that kind of person
I know beauty can unmake
a granite monument
Can turn an animal
into smoke

Silence (An Index)

my friend Shamala at the window, the egg-colored wall, Saj in the shower, my mom in the kitchen with the three glass bowls, never used, the rick ricer, the shallow sink, the old woman reads the magazine in the museum basement, hands shaking, fingers follow words, my callow sympathy, I am coming to be everything I hate, the coffee and the marzipan, the frequent checking, the feigned interest, the quiet but not all-knowing faces of iguanas, crackers with nothing on them, not simply because, three times as many mornings spent in recovery, Hilary, standing with a sandwich, stupid red scarf, I loved her, the way people love their shoes, an agreeable nod, a tree building itself up again, build yourself up, there was once a fire here, at which point we all ran and hid, at which point the roots started splitting into wires lighting up the ground, ash blowing silt, all ash fails to cover me, so humid inside me, my old street, low hanging branches, where we used to watch the worms inch down, Shamala on the stairs, swinging under beams, the prayer on the wall, the poem on the wall, the old light lantern, pointing toward the floorboards, the low, frequent buzzing, someone dancing, something caught

Pliny

Once said that people
Can't all have their own Gods.
They would start to outnumber us
Eventually, would take the form of alabaster
And leaves.
Now I'm home in this city
Where I was three months ago
And everything has changed.
There is something dire
About the air from the lakefront
(the way it hangs in the elevator)
And my mother
Who has aged so slightly
Those minor revolutions
Of face

Study of my Body the Pantomime

Stepping out of this room

*

Is one type of obedience

*

I could stand still as a soldier

*

I have never loved a soldier

*

Whatever caused you to scissor your arms

*

And remove your jacket,
And remove your shirt

*

I was a lifting rudder,
An arm

*

Alone and wild
Numerous, I am

*

Colorful against that silt

*

You should really hear my breathing

*

Granules in the landscape

*

Where I am a listing woman

*

buttons, pregnancy, wine

*

winter fruit, and
the weight of grassy structures

*

so quickly leaves the world

Study of My Body Filling With Air

Inside the bones of a bottle is a small breath

*

Can you feel it?

*

(A thousand voices hover and drop)

*

I felt an eyelid roll out of my hand, I wrote that
leaning on my elbow in the dark

*

I felt like I was in a movie

*

I ran toward the tall white building
with purple tunnels underneath

*

Nothing worse than a train rolling past you

*

It's bright wind taking everything inside it

*

the sensation of waving after
nothing facing you

*

so pleased to make it yours

Untitled (Elegy)

after Elizabeth Willis

Leave this window.
Leave this night.
Leave the
spoon in the jar,
the underfed
angle, unbuttered laugh.
Leave this bread
for the cat, and for the birds
in the poems who have removed their beaks,
“someone has put cries on the air like jewels”
leave the tallest window
intact, the poem has spoiled
in the pocket of your coat,
leave the crumbs to fall
through the cracks
where I have not invented air,
leave the reddest summer
to face the hall,
close the door,
leave me on my side
so I can dream in
the bone-deep blue,
my bone-deep blue,
where I have never gone hungry,
leave me,
if I decide to follow
leave the raven
the feet on stilts
in the tunnel
without wind,
take your time,
leave shoes, leave
this city to dry
along its silty banks,
take the shore
inland,
bury this rock.

Larry Levis' Opossum

Has sharp teeth
Little incisors
Black lips
Bright red gums
Roams the avenues
Lives at Wilshire
And Santa Monica
Sleeps in sewers
Sleeps in fountains
And sinks
Is five years old
Could scare a goat
Could sever a hand
Ate a dead squirrel
Where no one could see
But they came for him
Stumbling out of bars
Pointed and ran
Turned their heads
Someone tried to kick him
Someone threw a rock
That crashed through a windshield
(They swear)
They wanted to help him
Surrounded him
As if to clear the street
Of the moving traffic
He barred his teeth
Nothing could be done
He couldn't hide
From the young boy
Clutching the phone
Who watched him sleep
In his mother's marigolds
He called the people
with the noose and the pole
Told them to hurry
His sister makes a sandwich
In the darkened kitchen
With silent disapproval
She removes the crust
Turns toward the stairs
He asks her to stay

Half-Shine

To sleep next to someone and expect to dream.
To wake up next to someone like you are not alone.
To see their likeness in a pair of shoes, unbuckled
overcoat, slide your hand in a glove.
To know how and why that singing comes to you,
when you are standing there,
And why it makes you want to take a seat,
if the doctor says take a seat
and if there is a window in the back of the cab
to know it will take you to the edge of the city's shore,
where there is a bridge to stare at and crawl behind,
and there is a place to sit

To be a small piece of conversation, a nod
but sitting there, among the sharp grasses, you feel the small charge of light,
the small heart of your mother
has become a larger heart,
a sympathetic rule,
The small heart of your mother,
which has taken you this far

Onset, New York Onset, Massachusetts

To be in the way of something
The smallest transparency like silk
To have the most inappropriate shoes
When you are standing in the front row of the velveteen room
The drums in the orchestra are tumbling
and announcing the time
Let them say it
If you could just wait here a second
Before the first person walks in

Song in July

You say it amounts to something,
a short walk is enough,
we're flying past Denver, you see me
as I used to be
a little more decisive
with vague, religious feelings
when driving in the rain
I never marveled at my own flinty handshake
I never saw the vengeance in these woods
no relative has ever stood here
so long, not my grandfather, my cousin
whose mouth is a life
I could have had
Mouth full of sweet white maple
empties so fast
the world hangs on
What prayer could pull us over this currant bush
Or liken me to someone who prays,
Or fasts, or feeds the ground with flashlights
I would feed anyone my feeble attention
If feeding is letting go

Not a Red Rose (An Ode)

after Bernadette Mayer

When there were four, I wasn't sorry.
I was green, and seldom knew fear.
Now that I'm sorry
speaking does harm.
Speaking does harm,
to whomever
knows how red and fearful
the sorriest words are.
Be prepared to lose heart.
Do you know how sorry someone can be?
To be sorry when anyone sorrier
is seldom there,
And seldom gone,
So that sorry is reddest
And deepest in winter,
And everywhere sorry becomes
reddest in spring,
So that three sides is reddest
also and seldom
enough,
And no besides anywhere,
Besides is gone,
seldom seldom
nowhere, to become
nowhere and sorriest
never, sorry because
speaking is useless, speaking
to know how sorry
speaking becomes.

For A Year You Listened to George Oppen While Falling Asleep

If resistance was useless
If fear was indistinct from lying down
If, when held inside bones, you could only speak of the bones.
The great stone, the river, the pylon of the bridge
If the wind moves through grass and brings the smell of urine
I was thinking of how this city left a scar on my knee
Start by scaling up my leg
When I say “people,” I mean everyone I’ve never touched.
From outside the window, a mangled mouth
There was a time when I would have been able to peel it back
Call this lastingness, the way it is
“the feeling of presence,” no
actual beyond doubt
the way an infant remembers gravity, not things
the force of these days in the habit of grief
Why am I never allowed to close my eyes
The bed made the sound of a marching band
I imagine you waking in a spinning chair
Scanning the news, and the news is always war
What does it mean that I don’t want to fight
So they may exist, press down on my knees
Let the bed retain its glow
He wants to say, his life is real
Fears it might never be said
That light
If he can

Placed on an Empty Table

for Oren Silverman

You can become a person that carries paper through the street

You can carry waste, stencils

You can speak in the tongue of your mother, in the proudest tongue

You can become all that is against you in the morning, all that hands you wax

You can let them catch up to you in a dream, from where you were standing
you couldn't see them and then they were closer, right there

You can laugh again, try

You can pull against all that is yours, every hour that is yours

You can handle this so delicately, sprouting wood, this brand new finger in the world

You can say poetry does nothing, handles the same as a rotary,
makes the shape of a scythe, a wheat field snapping, jade

You can be everything in the street that I saw.

You can walk through the bedroom: there is a lime and a laundry basket by the door

You can look into the drain and there is a lake where I used to swim and fall

You can call up the tree, all against yourself, press your head to every leaf

You can call up to the window where all the people that love you stay

You can become that person, you know, who we used to drive around with
And now we don't know them like that anymore

You can linger in a dream with the burning chaplet

You can be the one to carry it, they will either walk ahead of you,
Or they will carry your light

I Wanted the Aspen Trees to Break

In a dream I walked out mammoth
no railing
my shadow settled across
the city in an overlay of blue.
With palatial dread
I went to the edge of something
and addressed it like I would a close friend:
I want you to know,
I know you can tell
anyway, that I'm dead.

How was it that I woke up shivering
and held sheets over things that didn't move.
All day I went on humming, complaining of a hunger outside me
All the women I saw were carrying bread.

I Wanted the Aspen Trees to be Audible

There must be a better way
to say this knife is dull.

Better men have done it:
gasped and backed away slowly

like nothing in this room would survive
that kind of dent.

Here, we make that kind of dent.

Here I am a horizontal edge
in the morning

I don't know the business of lunging
in a primary sense

But I know what it is
to vacate a room

To stand inside the weather

and circle beneath
all these miniature thoughts

I leave the poem

unbuttoned for days
and it dies.

Plain statements are made
about death

How we don't laugh enough
at our culinary errors

In the middle of the ceremony,
I ask what is

an elemental condition
Someone hands me an eyelash

Your laughter
announces the entrance
of a leaf

October (Miracle)

for Oren, with a line of John Godfrey's

When we saw the aspens
approaching the train
the sky bursts open
I know this place
I can't always recall
everything that goes here
there's a green limb inside me
I can't always see
Look, we pass by here
The conductor says she's seen a moose
the conductor annoys the shit out of you
we watch the woman next to us eating a plum
October floods the windowsill
knows it won't be back
On the way down to Texas
you drove through the night
looked straight at the hurricane
soon taking place
We drove back to Denver
made a left at the mountain
a residue of color
and more
always more

Elegy (Museum)

In a dream
I live in a glass room exposed to bricks.
There are three exits.
All face out.
All paths go to the bridge
At the edge of winter
And sit there in a
Simple, idiotic light.
There are things to ask for, and ponder.
It feels good to breathe.
This map I can't understand
Moves me with its craters and allusions
To rivulets and moons.
Someone is playing the harmonium,
Someone dies.
I am given this cue.
To breathe and speak the words
Slowly, to listen for the oncoming noise.
A woman's voice is a wall and a storm, it says.
I can listen if I want.
I am listening to the way I sound
And I am the most beautiful thing
but I want feasts.
Take me to the feasts.
This way for the feasting
Says the man
To the artificial light.

Miracle (Spoken to a Scientist)

*after Prageeta Sharma
for Simone Weil*

Have you ever reached the limit of your strength? What was the primary feeling? There was a time when I felt the constant withdrawing of secrets. I could only see what was in front of me. I was only aware of a bright yellow wall. I tried to look past it. When I stood up, trees shook. I didn't want to rush so I held on to others. They lead me around a yard full of bright, distorted materials, where I sometimes recognized myself. *But what does that mean? Are you simply dreaming of sentimental delights?* It's not sentimental to dream. Sometimes a throat catches fire. Sometimes a light fades. I woke up this morning with a list of possibilities and immediately crossed them off. I wasn't ready to savor the beginning, so I found a tree with too many parts and I stared at it until I fell asleep. It was nice to feel the wind move. But I still know this is the beginning. *How can you account for it? What have you been doing all this time, in this transitional space?* I start each day with a written date. I have been instinctually imitating the heat and the feel of the heat. Today someone was walking so fast toward an entrance and I saw it as an embellishment or an act of devotion. There is a woman sitting next to me who is singing quietly and she doesn't know it and she isn't trying

I hate going backwards. – Wayne Koestenbaum

Though I feel like I could have written these words, I don't fully believe them. I'm a creature of habit, and I get just as much pleasure out of recalling something familiar as I do from willfully forgetting it, becoming lost. Today, on the last day of being in my 20s, I'm looking through my records. It's a kind of ceremony – a ritual to find out what ghosts me. Keith Jarrett's *The Köln Concert* was always my go-to, a date record, something I could hear in my sleep. Tom Petty's *You're Gonna Get It* was for drinking alone secretly before going out. *Nashville Skyline* was for playing my harmonica poorly in the middle of the day. *Something Like a Bird*, one of Charles Mingus' last records, I've never touched. I can't find my *Astral Weeks*. It was the mystic, the fearless rapture I both thought impossible and hoped to someday uncover in myself. The first guitar riff immediately takes me someplace else. Now I'm listening to it in my car. Now I'm in my house on Caney Street. I'm sitting on the couch in the green living room, discovering that I can play along to "Sweet Thing" in an E scale. I'm playing this for a friend with my eyes closed. He's touching my back. I'm drunk, conducting the flute part with a choppy hand. Now I'm sitting on a different friend's floor in Brooklyn and he saying stop, it's too much, before turning away from the record player with wet, reddened eyes. Later, when he's asleep, I listen to the whole thing, playing each song back twice. Here is the next song. It's the first time I've ever heard "Madame George" on vinyl, and the bassline is lifting for the first time, and I have no idea when it's going to end.

I suppose some writers have already experienced what they write about – Wayne Koestenbaum

Parents are collecting their children from the therapist's office. I am sitting on the couch across from a fish tank when the first Dad walks in. He is short and chipper and wrapped excessively in an orange wool scarf. It's just the two of us in the waiting room, and when he doesn't take out anything to read, I become anxious. Finally the therapist comes out with his kid. He squeals and climbs onto his Dad's shoulders as another, heavily cloaked woman walks in. The Dad leaves, lobbing an undirected smile back into the room, and a different therapist enters with a sullen, blonde-haired boy. "Okay, guys, see you Wednesday," she mumbles gingerly, as if she is hinting at something, and the Mom looks at her with suspicious gratitude as her boy runs out of the room at full speed. What is this transaction? Made purely of the fear of loneliness and the tenuous promise of health. When my therapist asks me to recall a time when I felt more solid, I am distracted. I can't stop thinking about Rachel's Beta Fish, Big Edie, who I have never met. She is named after the mother in the movie *Grey Gardens*, and if Big Edie is the mother, this makes Rachel Little Edie, the daughter. I imagine the fish floating toward the glass and looking straight into an empty room. I imagine Rachel getting home and putting on a record, maybe making some food. The florescent light in the tank gives off a subtle buzzing. They sit together silently, in a quiet, fortified disrepair.

Stein's language puts forward embarrassment: *you didn't expect this.* —Wayne Koestenbaum

I am sitting in the classroom while my students trickle in. I am about to teach Gertrude Stein, who I don't necessarily feel qualified to teach. I love Gertrude Stein. Reading her is a kind of ecstasy, a self's displacement, and a miracle involves a kind of ecstasy, in that its cause is passionately believed in, yet mostly unknown. I start to read through "A Waist," -- this is when I start to feel other. I have never been anyone's real sister. I have never been able to bake a jar. I have rarely seen a face without thinking of another face. I have rarely been able to fall asleep while being a woolen object. Here is the turn here is the turn. A star glide, a single frantic sullenness, a single financial grass greediness. How do we read this fragment? An object that is in wood.

Pilgrims were people whose recipes were simple. – Anne Carson

I am at the grocery store, I am here to buy the ingredients for Portuguese eggs. I don't know who came up with this recipe. I am Portuguese, and I've never actually seen this preparation, let alone heard of it taking 45 minutes to make some god damn eggs. My therapist asks me how I might feel more fulfilled. I say go out, find new things. Now all I can think about is making kale potato soup, something I make at least once a week. I am buying ingredients for it now, slightly disappointed. I throw a few extra things in my basket. When I get home, I find mold in the brain of a raspberry.

You are loved – Made-up Proverb

Do you think so? I don't know. I think I am loved because *you* are loved. And you. Outside there is a woman walking her dog, a man rushes by her. I am driving around looking for a parking place. The window fogs up from inside the car. The air outside is very, very cold.

Photographs Never Taken of Women in Various States of Illumination

The mind needs to be enlightened by light from outside itself –St. Augustine

Mothers

I once sat in a diner in the east village waiting for my mother. It was lunchtime – a crowd of nicely dressed people and families filled the booths. A man at the counter ordered a grilled chicken sandwich – I heard him order in a rushed, familiar-sounding voice – and as they were making it the room filled with smoke. I sat with my menu for as long as possible. A line was accumulating at the door, it was cold, the waiter kept approaching me anxiously. I ordered a hot chocolate. I ordered a cup of lentil soup. Then she arrived. As she pushed her way through the crowd, a row of angry heads turned. She walked across the room in a bright red coat and black heels, a paisley blue scarf, She looked radiant, happy. I wanted to scream. I felt embarrassed for having been left there so long, for how beautiful she looked. When she sat down, a cold wind blew straight at my face. She began to tell me about her day. They brought us water, napkins. I remember the way her hands moved so patiently across the table, teared the yellow sugar pack. The line thickened by the entrance. The coffee tasted like drenched roots.

*

I go to pour. The woman looks at me apprehensively. The pitcher is over-filled with ice, and as I tip it forward all of it rushes quickly to the top. The sound is harsh – it startles her daughter, who is standing across from me with her nose just barely clearing the table. I can't help but imagine the worst-case scenario: the water gushing out of the pitcher, the ice cubes flying and sliding straight into the young girl's face. I try to act calm, waiting for my glass to fill, but a spontaneous smile rises out of me, something I did not expect. I feel a palpable tension between the three of us. The woman grabs her daughter by the arm, pulling her away from me.

Someone is posing for a picture. It lights up the computer screen of the man sitting next to me, who has no idea I am looking at it, too. The woman is wearing a red bandana, her blonde hair escapes under it in tight curls. She has presumably reached some kind of summit, is on top of some mountain holding her hands to the sky. Her back faces the camera – her legs are locked. The gesture seems triumphant, and also suspicious, cliché. I suddenly feel a wave of unassigned shame. I try to distract myself. I recall the interactions I've had today. The man who tried to flirt with me while pouring my coffee, the wax paper that dropped to his feet. The woman outside who noticed that my taillight was cracked. And you, asleep as I was leaving, with your eyes buried in the pillow and your left shoulder pressed to the wall. All these faces appear immobile, even posed, as a photograph might demand. I think of my parents, the picture of them framed and sitting on my bookshelf on its back. Everyone says I look like my father, but I've always known that I look like my Mom. When she looks straight into the light you can see her secretly feral gaze. I once told her I had looked at her face more than any other face. She fidgeted, laughed. The waiter brought bread. I realize now there was no other way to respond to that statement. I often say things like that, things that don't really merit a response, statements that resemble questions, or stones. In my memories, this quality has gone mostly unnoticed, but I don't fully trust my memories.

Two women stand on the street. One is wearing a long gray skirt, is considerably older than the other and has bright orange hair. The younger one, wrapped excessively in a black and red scarf, is looking somewhere past the other woman's shoulder at the busy street ahead. A man is approaching – he is an acquaintance of theirs – when he notices them he starts to slow down. They are visibly upset, fighting. The younger woman looks straight at the older woman, says something harshly, at which point the older woman lowers her eyes as if to consider it. People move around them cautiously. They have lost their sense of proportions. The side of the building next to them is glimmering in the sun, reflects white flashes around their feet. The younger one is now looking down exhaustedly, trying to meet the other's gaze. The man finally approaches. They both jump, struggle through small-talk. This is one of the minor humiliations I associate with love.

There are people reading Ovid at my house. At a certain point I can't concentrate anymore – I go to my room to lie down. I wake up briefly to the sound of someone passing through to get to the bathroom. For some reason I know it is Mathias – he is very quiet – my cat is startled, then squirms to find the perfect crevice between my body and the sheets. When I fall back asleep, I am in a dream in my living room. Everyone is there: Joe, Mathias Oren, Chris, Sarah, the girl who I'd never met and whose name I don't remember. "For Cynus had become a swan – a strange new bird, who does not trust his wings..." someone reads. I spontaneously laugh, which no one seems to notice, then leaf through my copy frantically trying to find the page. When someone else starts reading, I am distracted, I am tapping my foot anxiously, I am the only one who bristles at the sudden sound of the bottle breaking outside. Someone stands up – I motion toward the bathroom and they follow the direction of my hand. I can't tell if I am incidental, if I am visible or even wearing clothes. Someone is still narrating Cynus' transformation, whose swan-body has now saved him from Achilles. What does the soul become, I want to ask, because it occurs to me that I am one, a quiet, sticky, bright blue riverly soul, a rock, but no one hears me think this, or say it, they instead walk back and forth to the bathroom, stopping in the kitchen to pour drinks. I am afraid to touch your elbow, which protrudes along the edge of the blue chair, for fear of you not reacting. I can't seem to get comfortable. I can't tell how far apart from anything I am.

*

When I talk to my Mom on the phone, there is a matter of fact-ness to my life. Yes, we are fine, I am writing a paper today, the heat finally turned on. A girl across the street is sitting on a stoop with her dog – I watch her absently as I squeeze the phone to my ear and pace. The girl is still there when we get off the phone, she is examining her dog's teeth, squeezing his cheeks. The feeling of resolve and togetherness I had a minute ago settles into a thick malaise. I put on a record and go to make coffee. In the *Metamorphoses*, the idea that everything turns into something else is a given. Adonis turns into an anemone. Persephone turns Mentha into fragrant mint. Apollo and Daphne turn into bay laurels. Bark threatens to cover their mouths.

Acts of Devotion

The woman is sitting across from me. She opens a blue backpack. On her paper are six shapes drawn on six small, evenly-spaced graphs. She considers them for a while, arranging a row of colored pencils in the space between her elbow and the wall. She picks up the green one, circles what looks like a diamond. As she circles it, the shape gives off the impression of being three dimensional – it seems to hover above its graph netting. She circles the triangle with the same pencil, then replaces the green for a blue, returns to the page, circles the triangle and the square. She does this for a few minutes – just circling shapes – sometimes tracing one she has already drawn in a different color. She starts connecting points, drawing lines that will eventually intersect. Then come the gradations, mostly shades of yellow and white. I notice at some point that she is speaking to herself – maybe she is singing, or counting. I start to feel that I shouldn't be here. At the table behind us, someone spills their coffee and it starts to careen across the floor. Laughter erupts. The woman doesn't react, she only moves slightly away from the paper as if something is living there. I turn to the coffee shimmering on the floor. At least a minute passes before anyone moves to clean it up.

*

At the other side of the table, a woman is sitting staring at the door. She has a notebook open, but only looks down at it intermittently. When I get up to leave, we make eye contact. The only thing I remember about her now is her wet curly brown hair, and her fraying, polka-dotted cardigan, its preciousness.

When I lived at home, there was always a commotion whenever anyone walked into the apartment. My Mother, at the very least, would rush toward the door and ask the usual questions – where you have been, who was there, etc. I remember fearing that moment, as much as she must have feared the silence that would exist without it. When you love someone, you know what they are afraid of, and maybe you do your best to protect them from it. But how fears manifest in spite of our efforts I don't know. I confuse hers with mine. I feign excitement, I start to talk a mile a minute and then feel exhausted, contemptuous. Simone Weil believed that the beautiful in verbal art must be like the visually beautiful, a “contained movement,” a point in space rather than a duration in time. Can you see the fear in my voice? In its raw state, in its desire to not-be, can it forget itself? Riding up the elevator, I feel the familiar dragginess, I am full of dread, I am a scared person. I pull my sleeves up around my shoulders. I remember thinking this is something I cannot fix.

*

How could I explain to you the pastiness of the walls today, the anxious, cloistered feeling, the way it turned to lime in my mouth? I go to make coffee. The water boils impatiently.

I am carrying a bag full of books. They are awkwardly bulging into my back. I need to craft a syllabus for my Intro class – I have my Collected Stevens, my Niedecker, my Oppen. I immediately think of “A Rabbit as King of the Ghosts,” the fat cat with his green mind slopping the milk. When I read this poem, I think of Noah passing it out the first day of our first workshop, I think of him reading it: “fat cat, red tongue green mind, white milk.” We all relax into our seats. I imagine the cat, his fat green body lying in a field in the sun. I know the hero of the poem is the rabbit, who finally achieves that rabbit light “in which everything is for you / and nothing need be explained,” but I have always wanted to be the loafing cat, with nothing to achieve but space on the ground, who has no idea that he will eventually turn into a green bug. They are out of my coffee – I watch it spurt from the thermos into my half-filled cup. I act mildly disappointed, hoping to get it for free, but I get no special treatment. When I finally sit down, a man looks up at me curiously while I drop my Stevens book onto the table. I ignore him. He looks up again, trying to make eye contact, but I’m just sitting there, slouching.

*

In the hallway of the French high school, some of Simone Weil’s students are sitting on a ladder, trying to erase the words “No one admitted unless he knows geometry,” which are etched above the door.

*

In the photograph, a naked woman tears at the wallpaper. In the photograph, she covers her body with the pieces she has torn. She stands against the tattered wall – a group of people regard her thoughtfully. Another woman is outside the building, searching the addresses frantically. The words “I’m sorry” well up in her in waves.

*

Sitting in the car, the sun is just setting. You are walking somewhere along 18th street, and I will be at least another hour. I adjust the music and open the window – the air is strangely balmy. My desire is begins to swell around my body. My desire is as round as a peach.

It's my birthday, and I am sitting in a coffee shop I rarely go to. This place has the best coffee in the city, and yet I often go the mediocre place across the street. I feel that I should reflect on my current state. I want to be happy, I think, while I eat a chocolate croissant. I want to feel settled, calm. The table next to mine is crowded with old women – they pass a newspaper back and forth, debating something loudly. 'Dostatochno! one of them yells, which is Russian for enough, and for a second I notice the green and purple succulents by the window – they are starting to bloom – though I can't for the life of me remember their name.

Naked People

A man is sitting alone at the table. He is looking numbly at a magazine cover – crumbs have gathered on his face. A younger man with a green sweater is walking around the room handing out flyers and free granola bar samples. A loud, and somewhat familiar song is playing on the radio, and when he's standing idly he starts to sing along. As I watch him approaching the older man, who can barely hold the coffee mug to his lips, who hasn't opened the magazine, the dimensions of the room seems to widen at the edges. The yellow bag on his table must mean someone else is in the bathroom – the door sweeps open and shut, letting in a breeze. As the older man looks at the flyer in front of him, he makes a face of intense confusion, pushes against the table with the palms of his hands. The sound of a wasp banging desperately against the window cuts through the music. I didn't know how difficult this would be, the man in the green sweater says, turning toward me.

*

When you are very sick, your body shuts down. I know this is supposed to happen to everyone, but it really happens to you. Your cheeks shrivel and dry out. Your eyes are always wet. You wheeze. When I get home, you have wrapped yourself in a bundle, made your own soup. I sit on the edge of the bed and look at you cautiously. You are muttering to yourself incomprehensibly. I pick one of my books off the floor and dust it off. Why are you talking to me, you say.

Another woman stands by the pool. She is very beautiful. We are the only ones here at 9pm – neither one of us really wants to get in. She cries out as soon as her legs touch the water -- she looks back at me – I am staring at a long black hair floating but I manage to laugh. Eventually we are both swimming laps, in adjacent lanes, which is why I maybe came here in the first place, to swim next to someone or alone and imagine someone else here and be relieved that they weren't. I feel a strange thrill every time I see the flare of her metallic bathing suit through the water. She is swimming slightly faster than me. When she gets out, she sits on a bench with her head against the wall and her eyes closed. Someone passes her to get to the sauna. The next time I go under, I imagine that she might be looking for me, but when I come up she's gone.

*

In the sauna, three men speak a language I think is Russian – an older man with gray hair and his two sons. Though none of us can understand him, it is not hard to follow the arc of his story, which is now reaching a breaking point – he puts his hand on one of his son's shoulders and laughs while the other one stares into the smoldering coals. A very tall man squeezed into spandex shorts comes in – everything quiets – he puts his massive hands on the ceiling and starts to tap a rhythm. There is something joyous about this. I remember once when I was very young I walked in on my parents dancing very late at night. They were a little drunk, swaying in the middle of a dark room to an Ella Fitzgerald record, and as I sat on the couch across from them I started to trace an outline of our apartment – every room, hallway, and door, across the table in intricate detail. Dust started collecting under my nails as I moved across the room, making sure to touch everything, and by the time they turned on the light and saw me there were handprints all over the wall.

*

In the locker room, a woman is standing with her back to the door, looking at her phone. Her clothes are in a heap. Suddenly it starts ringing – she answers it, accidentally pushes speaker-phone. A man's voice enters, repeating her name over and over. Hang on, she says nervously, looking over her shoulder. I look at my face in the mirror as I tie my shoes.

Things pile up at the door: Comcast bills, take-out menus, a letter from the DMV, a birthday card from my Mom, a thank-you note from the baby-shower I did not attend. I put the birthday card on my fridge and open the note – “Thank you for the giraffe hat and mittens. I can’t wait for you to meet her,” it ends. This makes me tear up a little. Suddenly, I feel a loose sense of anticipation. Outside, when the woman places something into her child’s hand without him really noticing I think of how my mother used to do this. Those unconscious intimations of safety. I smile at the woman though she doesn’t see me. I feel like I know her. I feel like I understand her but I don’t.

*

At some point during my drive home I think to myself, “desire is not enough.”

*

In her notebooks, Simone Weil writes: “To lose someone: we suffer because the departed, the absent, has become something imaginary and unreal...[Their presence] is imaginary, but [their] absence is very real: henceforth it is a way of appearing.”

*

A pre-emptive grieving. An appearance of what is still here.

*

At the long table in the coffee shop, a woman is reading over my shoulder. At first it annoys me, then I become used to it. Her phone keeps vibrating on the table but doesn’t pick it up. Her headphones pulsate with a muffled, electronic drone. This is my first iced-tea in months. I am reading a six-page poem, stalled on it for some reason, but when I get home I only remember these lines:

“If you’re pushing, pushing and then it begins to pull you.”

“If afterwards she would sit the way a very old person sits, with no pants on, confused.”

You start each day the same. You wake up quickly. You shower. You change in the dark. You bring your notebook to the same corner in the same coffee shop and write the last thing you had written the day before, in very small lettering, sometimes several times.

*

You keep your notebook buried in your bag with other notebooks you've filled.

*

When you decide to empty your bag, you put the notebooks in an orange box under your desk. I've never seen you open it.

*

Last night you came home and put your head into the pillow. When I tried to get up, you stopped me, making yourself heavier somehow.

*

This morning I woke up with my hands under my face and thought of waking up on the subway, after a very long night, dangerously close to the lap of a stranger. My red scarf had fallen over his foot.

*

We are hanging out with friends. We decide we all like the same movie. It is the best! You start to describe the scene in which Bill Murray is hungover driving in a van with the other newscasters and the woman he will eventually fall in love with, but our friend cuts you off. I can't actually see you from where I am sitting, but I can see your foot, which tenses, then relaxes, then begins to tap. The friend starts to describe a part in the middle, when it's cold and Bill Murray walks absently toward two men in top hats. His description becomes more and more elaborate – he is taking liberties and digressing. The dog runs outside and we are all distracted for a minute. I realize I am drunker than I thought. And I know you are waiting to talk again, pursing your lips and scooting up in your chair. And I know we are both tired and hungry, and I know we are listening politely because this is the most boring part.

Levitations

In the waiting room, a woman is reading a handwritten note. She looks very engrossed. The green toes of her shoes start knocking together. At one point she squints her eyes, puts her finger to the page and starts dragging it across.

*

I am leafing through *Outside Magazine*, which I've never read before. I come across an article about a man who has climbed Everest six times. Most recently, he did it in record speed, unaccompanied except for one Sherpa. He tells the interviewer of how he almost froze to death on the descent. I can't get it out of my head for some reason. Later I think this is the kind of thing you do only after loss.

*

Another man, I read, sky-dove through a mountain cave with wings strapped to his arms. When I tell you this later we laugh about how we would never do this, how neither of us our predisposed to physical bravery – your Dad being a chess player, my Mom sang in a choir.

*

Even now, in the rare event that we go to church, she sings loudly, catching harmonies while my Dad and I stare silently ahead. Lately, she seems more comfortable there. When I'm worried about something she tells me "I've been praying for you."

*

For a summer I read Simone Weil in a small room with three windows. I had reached a place so low it was hard to sit with myself. We wondered if we'd get through it. I wanted to fix my attention on a clearer, more credulous voice, but Weil's belief is one of stark metaphors, self-abstention, and eventually self-harm. "God withdraws so we can love him," she writes. In this sense, her suffering, her love of absence is a sign of her devotion, her reverence for the law of supernatural "light" rather than gravity. I found it difficult not to be skeptical of that kind of self-effacement – I kept thinking that I had something else to do, something better to read, but I kept reading her not from pure intellectual curiosity, but because I understood the impulse to undo myself all too well.

*

Sometimes I make lists of saints and miracles. The ones in the bible are mostly un-witnessed. And yet they are recounted omnisciently, authoritatively, told to us as proof of God's existence. I like to think that some could be retold. One woman I'm particularly drawn to, St. Gemma Galgani, was so filled with "the love of Christ" that she levitated in her kitchen, her feet dangling above the floor as she held her broom. Her mantle-coat is now framed beside the window. As a young girl, she appears to have eerily pale eyes in photographs – her hair is parted down the middle as she looks blankly off to the side. In her saint-card, drawn after her death, she is praying, kneeling at a pew while a mysterious light from the altar shines straight at her face.

*

In the account, the mere thought of God made her heart pound faster and faster until she was hovering above the floor. But it wasn't her height – it was the fact of her breathing, peaked and undestroyed by love that was the miracle.

Annotated Bibliography

Biss, Eula. *The Balloonists*. Brooklyn: Hanging Loose Press, 2002.

I think this book was the most influential to my prose sections of the thesis. Eula Biss has a seamless prose style that carries so much emotion and insight. The book takes a central metaphor and uses it to explore intersecting personal narratives. I've learned and continue to learn about concision through reading her.

Carson, Anne. *Decreation*. New York: Random House, 2005.

It was hard to choose one Anne Carson book but *Decreation* combines poems, essays, and hybrid texts in a way I aspire to in the future. Her essay on Simone Weil, Marguerite Porete, and Sappho was very helpful, especially her highlighting Weil's ideas about the self: "The self...is only a shadow projected by sin and error which blocks God's light and which I take for a Being." Also, Carson's poem "Seated Figure With Red Angle (1988) By Betty Goodwin" has been one of the most influential to me, in that it uses listing, ekphrasis, and associative language to build both argument and layers of affect.

Christensen, Inger. *alphabet*. New York: New Directions, 1981.

I love and greatly admire Christensen's incantatory lyric. Her ability to continually reframe the mundane, exploring its various potentialities and scales, is something I learned from. I also love the way this book explores the idea that natural processes can stretch to infinity in a linguistic realm.

Cole, Norma. *To Be At Music: Essays and Talks*. Richmond: Omnidawn Publishing, 2010.

These compressed essays on a variety of topics, from George Oppen to Mina Loy to Stanley Whitney, have their own sense of motion and associative logic, while still maintaining a huge degree of control. When I began the thesis, I wanted to write more essays after this book – mostly about film – but was never able to. These essays will be the germ of a future project.

Foust, Graham. *To Anacreon in Heaven and Other Poems*. Chicago: Flood Editions, 2013.

This book made me think about fragments. Even though much of the book is composed of sentences, their relation to each other is often mysterious on first-read, and places much importance in the gap between lines, the work the reader does. These poems feel formally exciting in their emphasis listing, and also in their investment in contemporary culture (mostly as critique), in the conmingling of dark and light tones.

Gizzi, Peter. *The Outernational*. Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 2007.

This book changed me as a poet. Even when sorrowful, these poems celebrate the imagination and imaginative freedom. They feel open-hearted. The book's poetics move from being documentary to bewildered. It foregrounds the role of not-knowing while responding to historical matter, to the present social.

Guest, Barbara. *The Collected Poems of Barbara Guest*. Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 2008.

There is something so elegantly strange about Barbara Guest. Her poems are fluid and surprising – maintain the casual, New York School tone, yet remain feel fiercely independent within the group. What interests me most about her poems are the liminal reality they occupy. As she says in her essay "Forces of Imagination": "The most important act of a poem is to reach further than the page so that we are aware of another aspect of art...What we are setting out to do is to *delimit* the work of art, so that it appears to have *no beginning and no end, so that it overturns the boundaries of the poem on the page.*" It is the way her

poems seem to trace their own becoming, or coming into being, that interests me most. I hope I've learned from it.

Guest, Barbara. *Forces of Imagination: Writing on Writing*. Berkeley: Kelsey St. Press, 2003.

Most important to me in this book was the essay I quote above, but also very important was her idea of her idea of imaginative appropriation: "because only imagination can return the texts to life."

Leslie, Juliana. *More Radiant Signal*. Denver: Letter Machine Editions, 2010.

There are three things I love about Juliana Leslie's poems: their compressed form, their paratactical leaps, and their sense of wonder. I feel very akin to the form Juliana's poems take on, their tendency toward smallness, but I have also learned a lot about making poetic turns or shifts without losing the overall affect of the piece.

Mayer, Bernadette. *A Bernadette Mayer Reader*. New York: New Directions, 1992.

Along with Barbara Guest (who is a very different poet), I have learned the most from Bernadette Mayer and from this book. Her poems are able to achieve such a specific type of distillation, while still maintaining the wildness and vulnerability that I would also call hallmarks. It's hard to choose an aspect of her work to highlight, but I think it is the cumulative effect of her lines, their sense of continuity (sometimes arising from voice or tone) amid giant, paratactical leaps, that is very singular and that I hope I've learned something from.

Moten, Fred. *The Feel Trio*. Denver: Letter Machine Editions, 2014.

I aspire, like Fred Moten, to work in different forms, to make my language more expansive physically on the page. I learned from him how to work in different voices, how to trust incantatory rhythms and see them through. I love this book!

Notley, Alice. *Grave of Light: New and Selected Poems 1970-2005*. Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 2006.

I started reading Alice Notley later in my MFA – to be honest I think I was afraid of her. There is an intensity to her poems that I really admire – something that feels performed in mysterious ways. There is also a surprising rootlessness to her work, in that it is always trying on different voices, tones, and forms. I've learned much from this adventurousness, and I've attempted to try on different voices in my work, or at least push them to uncomfortable limits. I especially admire her early work in this collection – mostly for *Songs for the Unborn Second Baby* – for its bravery and its feminist themes.

O'Hara, Frank. *Selected Poems*. New York: Knopf, 2014.

Of course I love the vibrancy of so many New York School poets. But what I particularly love about Frank O'Hara is his various modes of address, the changeability of the "you," the beloved. I read most of O'Hara's poems as love poems, but they are directed as easily at a lover as at a city, a painting, the sour cream in a cup of coffee. As deeply rooted in the everyday as his work is, its gesturing toward the secret economy in things feels like a gesturing beyond the mundane. I'm also really excited the poems' tracing of inspiration, and the catalytic process that takes place when being around other art, other artists. Much of the work in this collection speaks to and from other poets, so that really spoke to me.

Oppen, George. *Daybooks*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.

I'm including this instead of *Of Being Numerous* because I ended up taking some language from the from the *Daybooks* for a few poems in this collection. I am also interested in the fragmented thinking that occurs here – the webs of association and the . And of course Oppen's idea that poems come from *things*, the mundane, the historically relevant material around us. This is an ethics that I want to continue to explore in my work.

Rankine, Claudia. *Citizen*. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2014.

I have always been very inspired by Claudia Rankine's prose – the way it relies so much on personal narrative to explore and distill very large ideas. *Citizen* is obviously a book about race, but I hoped to use it as a kind of model for my "Photographs Never Taken," project – taking it instead in the direction of gender. The project took a different shape ultimately, but I often looked to this book for guidance.

Rankine, Claudia. *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*. Minneapolis, Graywold, 2004.

This book also uses personal narrative to explore large ideas, but focuses in more on cultural production and consumption. I love this book very much.

Sharma, Prageeta. *Undergloom*. Albany: Fence Books, 2013.

I came to this book very late, but I like how this book addresses everyday concerns: family, race, gender, the self, and takes on the institutions that house and define them, especially the academy, Whiteness, and the West.

Steady, Will. *Photographs Not Taken: A Collection of Photographers' Essays*. New York: Daylight Community Arts Foundation, 2012.

This book was very important for the foundation of my "Photographs Never Taken" project. So much of that project, and really the manuscript in general, is about the unseen, the liminal space, the undocumented experience. As opposed to photography's appropriative lens, I wanted these vignettes or narratives to be about what escapes appropriation, for them to form webs that might exceed expected modes of thought.

Weil, Simone. *Gravity and Grace*. New York: Routledge Classics, 1999.

It was difficult to choose a Simone Weil book to put here, as I also read a lot of her journals, but the fundamental opposition she creates – between light and gravity – is something I worked with throughout this entire manuscript. I became attached to the mundane because of her opposition to gravity. I also responded to her devotion to emptiness, which can then be filled by what she calls "grace."

Zucker, Rachel. *Mothers*. Denver: Counterpath Press, 2014.

This was also extremely influential to the prose sections of my thesis. The way Zucker is able to balance a wide variety of subjects, while also establishing a continuity throughout her prose blocks is really impressive to me. I find this book to be deeply affecting without being sentimental.

Zucker, Rachel. *The Pedestrians*. New York: Wave Books, 2014.

I loved the lyric prose at the front of this book, and while it feels tonally distinct from the poems in the back, I think the are both getting at something similar, which is an exploration of the way contemporary life (infused with capitalism) affects relationships. I structured this manuscript after this book.